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Devitalizing Elementary Language

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A NORMAL child uses language so constantly and so naturally in every activity or experience that it is extremely difficult to develop in him any strong feeling that it is not one of the most vital and important means he can use for the enrichment of life. Language seems to him to be the most natural tool available for exploring his varied relations with those about him, for discovering the meanings of his own experiences and observations, and for communicating his own feelings, desires, and ideas to others. An effective command of language appears to him to be one of his most vital needs.

The traditions of our schools, however, do not seem to agree at all well with the child's natural conception of language. There seems to be a very determined (although not entirely effective) effort by the schools to devitalize language. If the schools are correct in their treatment of this subject, there is need for a more efficient program that will organize the various devitalizing forces into a more unified effort to undermine the pupil's interest in language. The chief devices available for making children dislike the

study of language seem to fall into four related groups:

I. Generalize. Teach General Principles Rather Than Specific Habits

This general principle may be applied in many different and effective ways. One of the most popular plans is to teach the pupils general rules about language forms rather than specific applications to concrete situations. Giving a bright pupil specific illustrations of a rule might create so much interest that he would really understand the meaning of the rule, and probably forget its exact wording. If a teacher wishes to be certain that a vital interest is not developing, she should require the memorization of the rule without any illustrations.

One practice which should be avoided, because it is likely to create a vital interest in language, is to introduce illustrations of its applications to various situations before the rule itself is developed for the pupils to learn. Frequent meetings with situations which are alike may sometimes cause bright pupils to recognize the similarities, to develop general rules of their own, and to become interested in

using language devices for the accomplishment of their own purposes. The only really safe practice if one wishes to make language study unpopular, is to require the memorization of a well-formulated rule, phrased in language that is not easily understood by the pupil.

Another aid in the devitalization of language is to apply rules rigorously in correcting the speech and writing of your pupils, especially in those instances where a child's own uncorrected expressions are well understood by his fellows. When his classmates do not understand what he has tried to say, a child is naturally anxious to find help in making himself understood; but when everyone really understands him, he is very likely to resent having to make his statement conform to some rule that is only half understood. Insisting upon perfect conformity with such a rule is, however, an unusually effective device for devitalizing language instruction.

II. Formalize. Make Every Feature of Language Instruction as Formal as Possible

The textbook in elementary language should always be conservative, dignified, and strictly logical. It will probably be impossible to keep some degree of vitality from creeping into language instruction when no textbook at all is used, but a school should use the greatest possible care in choosing any book which the pupils are to use. An attractive literary style and interesting or suggestive contents are certain to draw the attention of pupils away from the pure logic of the language rules and forms. Vitality is especially likely to flood the pupil's language study if the textbook suggests anything which he would normally enjoy doing. The very tone of the language used in the textbook should be carefully controlled. If vital interest is to be prevented, both the textbook and the teacher must direct rather than invite the child. The pupil must be

dominated rather than inspired.

This suggests the strictly formal kind of atmosphere to be maintained in the classroom. The development of informal personal relations among the pupils or between pupils and teacher must be prevented at all costs. All rewards and satisfactions should be forced to flow from the accurate memorization of correct rules and forms. Informality in the classroom during the language period is certain to spoil every effort to devitalize the work done. For this reason, such special language activities as story-telling, letter writing, record keeping, and group discussion should be carefully subordinated to the purer and more formal matters of grammar, usage, narration, description, argumentation, and the like.

Language must be recognized as essentially a mental discipline. No physical activities of any type should be permitted in the language classroom, for such activities are always interesting and stimulating to children, especially in the lower grades. The mere time required for moving their bodies about the room inevitably reduces by that much the amount of time available in school hours for the exercise of their minds. Furthermore, the pleasure that children obtain from physical activity is quite certain to distract them from intellectual exercise, even to the point of making it permanently distasteful to them.

A special period should be set aside in each school day for drill on the rules and forms of language. Taking time to drill on a particular form at the moment some child shows that he has need of help with it would tend to make language appear useful and interesting. If attention is to be centered upon mastery of the real subject of language rather than upon its temporary manifestations, the subject should be taken up for serious drill by the entire class at the same hour each day. Every pupil should be required to stop whatever

else he may be doing and submit to this drill.

Similarly, the devitalization of language work requires that a special teacher of language be given entire responsibility for the training of pupils in this important field. If teachers of other subjects are permitted to give any instruction or drill in language, the pupils may lose their awe and dislike of the subject, since these outside teachers may allow their pupils to discover that language is really an effective set of skills to be used for interesting purposes. While it may be impossible to prevent some teachers of other subjects from making occasional comments about the character of the English used in recitations or in examination papers, there should be a strict regulation separating the various subjects if vitality in language study is to be held to a minimum level.

III. Judge. Be Strictly Impartial and Impersonal

Nothing can spoil a teacher's program for devitalizing language instruction more quickly than showing a personal interest in the problems of individual pupils. In order to carry out such a program successfully a teacher must make exactly the same assignments and requirements of all pupils. The same language rules and forms must be memorized, the same exercises and drills must be taken, and exactly the same themes must be written. No consideration should be given to the question of whether a certain pupil already knows the point you are trying to teach, for any partiality or recognition of individual differences by the language teacher would almost certainly lead in the direction of increasing the vitality of the pupil's interest.

The same just and impartial attitude should be maintained with regard to the different elements in the language course. The same amount of time should be allowed for teaching or drilling upon each

part of the course, and uniformly perfect standards of performance should be maintained; otherwise some pupil will feel that in giving more attention to the things which he enjoys the teacher is really favoring him. In writing their compositions upon a given subject, pupils should all be required to treat the subject in the same way, since allowing variations is certain to give unfair advantages to those pupils who may previously have thought about the subject. Rigid justice, applied impersonally, will be especially helpful in devitalizing language study for elementary school pupils.

IV. Discipline. The Child Must Learn to Conform

Great ideals that challenge both faith and courage are essential elements in the type of discipline that must be enforced in successfully devitalizing language instruction. The standards to be set up must be practically unattainable by pupils of the maturity represented in the class. Unless a child learns to recognize that his own efforts are ineffective and utterly lacking in merit, the study of language may become vital and interesting to him. He must be disciplined by being forced to stretch his own powers toward an accomplishment which is clearly greater and more perfect than the best anyone of his age can show.

Pupils should be required to write constantly. Oral language is likely to lead them into pleasant conversation, which in turn is very likely to develop a rather lively interest in the language class. To prevent this, there should be a uniform requirement of at least one written page each day from each pupil. These compositions need not all be read, but the pupils should never know which compositions the teacher plans to read. Some ingenious device should be developed for making certain that each pupil is handing in his paper each day, and occasion-

ally the teacher should examine with extreme care an example of the work of each pupil.

In examining a pupil's composition the important object of the teacher should be to make the pupil realize how poor and unsatisfactory his written materials are. No mere child should ever be allowed to think well of his own ideas or expressions. Be sure to call attention to every error, inaccuracy, or non-standard expression in the child's composition. Marking his paper with a red pencil, preferably one with a broad lead, and making the marks as large and conspicuous as possible is a rather effective method of arousing the pupil's emotions, and therefore of disciplining his mind and preventing enthusiasm about language work.

It is not necessary perhaps, to caution the experienced language teacher against allowing a pupil to know that he is making improvements in his work. As soon as a pupil finds out that he is actually improving in the quality of his work he is quite likely to take a more vital interest in it. This interest, in turn, may make it easier for the pupil to apply himself to his assignments, thus reducing their disciplinary value.

This is perhaps one of the most serious objections to the use of standard objective

tests; they make it possible for the child to prove to himself that he is improving. The other really serious objection is that the teacher may find from such a test that many of his pupils do not have any real need for the lessons scheduled for the coming weeks, because they have already learned them. For these and other reasons the teacher who wishes to devitalize language instruction should never give standard tests.

Summary

Since schools persist in trying to make their elementary pupils dislike language work, it seems worthwhile to organize their efforts in this direction. The writer suggests that most of the devices used could be included under four general instructions: (1) present generalizations to be memorized rather than specific habits to be acquired; (2) make every feature of language work as formal as possible; (3) be perfectly impartial and impersonal; and (4) discipline the child's mind and spirit thoroughly.

Note.—The writer admits that he does not believe that even such a unified program as that which he has outlined will remove entirely the average pupil's belief in language as a vital and interesting means of communicating with others.

EDITOR'S NOTE

A few months ago, there appeared in the *Atlantic* a mock condemnation of nursery rhymes, which so disturbed readers of that magazine that the editors felt called upon to publish a statement under the title, "A Satirist's Life is Not a Happy One," assuring readers that the author didn't mean it at all.

To forestall any such unhappiness in

Dr. Trabue's life, therefore, the editor wishes to assure those REVIEW readers who do not know him as a satirist that Dr. Trabue doesn't want teachers to follow the directions he gives so specifically here, nor does he believe, in spite of the abundant evidence, that they themselves want to.

Disobey him, and all will be well.

The Content of Language Textbooks*

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A DETERMINATION of the degree to which authors of elementary language textbooks are in agreement concerning content, placement, objectives, and drill has been the purpose of an analysis of the materials presented in books for grades five, six, seven, and eight.

In the present report only one question will receive consideration: To what extent do textbooks for the elementary grades agree in the matter of content for each particular grade?

For the purpose of this study, thirty-five widely used language texts were carefully analyzed.¹ Prominent publishers of textbooks were asked to submit their leading books for examination. Meanwhile an examination of related studies was made, the findings of which will be discussed in connection with the report concerning objectives.

Since 1900, numerous investigations, most of them dealing rather with composition than with technical grammar and language usage, have been made. The present tendency is evidently characterized by a more frequent use of objective methods in the attempt to determine proper content for the textbooks of each grade. While many of the studies agree in large measure regarding the more general concepts of language teaching, it is not possible to state here that the problem of content selection has been given a solu-

tion bearing the blessing of general consensus. The purpose of this report, then, is to show to what extent textbooks were found to agree as to the content materials offered.

Unfortunately, only slightly more than half the books submitted by the publishers could be used. The others failed to give even the slightest hint to show the grade levels they were intended to serve. In fact, there appeared frequently to be a studious avoidance of any statement that could be construed as suggesting an appropriate grade level for the materials contained.

The thirty-five books whose content materials were analyzed were written for the following grades: seven books for grade five, seven for grade six, ten for grade seven, and eleven for grade eight.

Now, obviously, in such a study as this, it would be unfair to include in the tabulations any item of language study that had been merely mentioned by the author of a text. Whenever there was doubt as to whether an item deserved being counted, it was omitted from the tabulation unless it was unquestionably intended by the textbook writer as an essential part of the lesson in which it was found. Great care was exercised also to avoid the error of including in a tabulation for a grade, an item that had been mentioned by the author merely as a suggested reference study or as a desirable subject for a student wishing to review the work of a previous grade.

Results of the Analysis in Grade Five.
In the fifth-grade texts, 145 items of language usage and of technical grammar

* EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of two articles by Mr. Lawson. The second, "Objectives, Grade Placement, and Drill Frequency in Elementary Language Textbooks," will appear in a forthcoming issue of THE REVIEW.

¹ For a complete report of the study, see the writer's thesis, *An Analysis of the Materials of Language Textbooks*, on file in the library of the Colorado State College of Education, Greeley, Colorado.

were found. Only twelve of these items were included by every one of the seven books. They were: (1) Set (and its various forms); (2) Sit (and its various forms); (3) The apostrophe; (4) The question mark; (5) The comma; (6) The period; (7) Quotation marks; (8) The use of abbreviations; (9) Informal letter writing; (10) Double negatives; (11) The paragraph; (12) Possession (in nouns).

The average lower limit of the range of frequency for the 145 items was .138 and the upper limit was 6.648. In other words, the typical item was included in .13 lessons by the book that included it the fewest times and 6.5 times by the book that gave it the most frequent study.

There were forty-seven items that were included in but one book each, leaving, therefore, ninety-eight items each of which was included in two or more books. Of these ninety-eight items, the average lower limit of the range of frequency was .204 and the average upper limit was 9.296. Here the typical item included by at least two books had a frequency range from approximately .2 to about 9.

Certainly it appears that we are justified in stating that authors do not agree as to the content of language books for the fifth grade. Out of a total of 145 items, only twelve commanded the attention of all seven texts. The so-called typical item was mentioned by slightly more than half the texts but entirely omitted by the others. To be completely accurate, one must imagine the item as being included in 59% of the texts and ignored by the remaining 41%.

Results of the Analysis in Grade Six. In the study of the sixth-grade textbooks, it was found that there were 140 items to be tabulated. These items included forty-one that were presented by but one book each and ninety-nine that were included by two or more texts each. There were six items included by all of the seven texts an-

alyzed. These six items follow: (1) Capital letters; (2) Commas; (3) Letters, formal; (4) Letters, informal; (5) Question marks; (6) Sentences (studied as such).

Among the 140 items, there was found to be an average range of frequency of 1.03 to 6.69. The range among the ninety-nine items that were included by more than one text each varied from an average low limit of 1.46 to an average upper limit of 8.636. In general, the facts disclosed were similar to those found in grade five. The theoretically typical item would be included by fifty-six sixth-grade texts if one hundred such texts should be analyzed. The others would not so much as mention the item once.

A peculiar difficulty was met in making the tabulations for this grade. At times it was found to be impossible to classify certain items without assuming the privilege of listing them by names not used by the textbook. For example, one author spoke of verbs as "phrasal forms" without mentioning the word "verb" at any place in his book. Another author spoke of them merely as "action words." For the sake of tabulation, it was necessary to classify all such terms under the simple heading of verbs.

Results of the Analysis in Grade Seven. In grade seven 137 items were found to be included each in more than one text. Thirty-three additional items were included by only one text each. This total of 170 items included 149 items each of which was omitted by at least one author.

Only the remaining twenty-one were included by each of the ten texts. They were: (1) Abbreviations; (2) Adjectives in general; (4) Adjectives (possessive); (4) Adverbs; (5) Capitalization; (6) Letters, formal; (7) Letters, informal; (8) Nouns in general; (9) Nouns (proper); (10) Number in nouns; (11) Phrases; (12) Predicate (of sentence); (13) Prepositions; (14) Pronouns; (15)

Story-telling; (16) Subject (of sentence); (17) Apostrophe; (18) Comma; (19) Period; (20) Question mark; (21) Quotation marks.

The average lower limit of the range of frequency was, for the total of 170 items, .165, and the upper limit was 4.012. That is, the typical item was listed .165 times in that book which listed it least frequently, and 4.012 times by the text that listed it most frequently. Or, say, not at all by the one, and four times by the other. The conclusion here, as with the preceding grades, seems to be that there is practically no agreement among authors of language texts for the seventh grade relative to the selection of specific items of material for study.

Results of the Analysis in Grade Eight. In this grade and in grade seven there appeared even a wider variety of terminology for certain individual language concepts than appeared in earlier grades. One author speaks of a "predicate word" in presenting a form which another author calls a "predicate." Another book, however, calls the same thing "a predicate nominative"; another calls it a "predicate complement"; and still another book uses the two terms, "predicate noun" and "predicate pronoun." In this study they were, of course, classified under one inclusive heading:

The eleven eighth-grade texts contained 218 separate technical items and language concepts. They are: (1) Comparison of adjectives; (2) Comparison of adverbs; (3) Capitalization; (4) Subordinate clauses; (5) Interjections; (6) Nominatives of address; (7) Direct objects; (8) Predicates (of sentences); (9) Prepositions; (10) Commas; (11) Quotation marks; (12) Periods; (13) Complex sentences; (14) Compound sentences; (15)

Subjects (of sentences); (16) Tense in verbs; (17) Transitive verbs; (18) Voice.

The above list can be misleading; it must be remembered that each item is a final division. Prepositions, for example, are listed, while nouns are not. Nouns were included as nouns by only part of the eleven texts, although each text included at least one of the several possible sub-classifications of nouns.

The typical item in this grade was included by 52% of the books. The average lower limit of the range of frequencies was .087 and the upper limit, 4.560. It may be noted that, if we imagine the typical item increased in proportionate frequency by each text until it is mentioned once by the last text, it will then be found that the text in which it receives greatest attention has studied it fifty-five times.

Thirty-six items were each included by but one of the eleven books.

Summary

By way of summarizing, it can be stated that if an item is selected at random from any grade from the fifth to the eighth, it is more apt to be listed by less than 15% of the authors for the grade than by more than 90%. In fact, the typical item from all grades is listed by 51.8% of the authors for the grade in which the item may be found.

In brief, the conclusion seems warranted that there is little agreement among textbooks in language as to what specific items should be presented to the pupils in a particular grade.

Other findings of the study will be reserved for a discussion of objectives, drill, and grade placement of language materials.

Who Is Equipped to Evaluate Children's Compositions?*

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EVIDENCE that many teachers are not equipped to evaluate children's compositions is furnished by the following table which gives the ratings of several hundred teachers on two sixth grade compositions.¹ "Poor" signifies below average, including failure, and "good," above average, including excellent.

	PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WHO GAVE EACH SCORE			Total
	Poor	Average	Good	
MARY'S COMPOSITION	5	65	30	100
MARTHA'S COMPOSITION	55	35	10	100

Whether Mary or Martha gets a failure or a mark of excellence apparently depends upon the particular teacher who does the scoring. While it is probably inevitable that there should be some difference of opinion as to the exact grade either of these compositions should receive, the extreme variation in the scores is not only significant, but presents a vital problem to the child.

The two compositions which were evaluated are given below.

*Mary's Composition**

How I HELP MY MOTHER

my share of the housework is washing the dishes, their are six of us at home so you see we have a great many dishes to wash, I never tried to reckon it but I am sure I wash a mil-

* A second article by Miss Duboc on the subject of grading compositions will appear in a forthcoming issue of THE REVIEW.

¹ This investigation was conducted by the writer in teachers' institutes and college classes from 1923 to the present year, 1935.

² These two compositions were adapted from those given in the *State Course of Study for Montana City Elementary Schools, 1924*.

lion a year my sister wipes them and we both wish we lived in the times when people eat out of the same dish with there fingers, we play this game to keep up our curage. we try to do them quicker every week last week we gained four minutes we didn't break any dishes either.

Martha's Composition

How I HELP MY MOTHER

Every day when I get up in the morning I eat my breakfast, wash the dishes, do the beds, and sweep the floor. Then I get ready to go to school. In the afternoon I just wash the dishes, and my sister sweeps the floor. When I come home from school, I do all the errands. Later I go out to play. When it is five o'clock I go home and stay home. At six o'clock we have supper. When we are all over with supper, I gather the dishes from the table. When I am done, I start to wash the dishes. When I have finished I say my prayers and go to bed.

When the teachers who scored these compositions were asked to state reasons for the ratings given, it was found that, as a general rule, (1) the grade given represented a general impression, rather than definite standards for written work, or (2) the grade was influenced unduly by some favorite point of emphasis (e.g., spelling or neatness), with a very heavy weighting of the mechanics of the paper.

The following statements, most of which are vague and general, are samples of the reasons most frequently offered by the teachers:

I consider Mary's paper poor because she was careless.

I consider Mary's paper very poor because it had many errors in it.

I would fail any composition in which there are misspelled words.

Mary has no sentence sense.

I would not fail any composition for fear that this would discourage the child.

Martha used "when" too many times.

I gave Mary an excellent grade because her composition had some good ideas.

I thought that Martha's composition was very good for a child in that grade.

Martha did not have as good ideas as Mary, but she was more careful. I thought that her composition was quite good.

Martha tried harder than Mary and should be given credit for effort.

I thought that Martha should receive an average grade because her paper had no misspelled words in it and there were no incomplete sentences.

Such ratings may have an unfortunate influence upon the child's thinking and expression. Mary, who has an alert mind, "gets by" without much serious effort to improve the mechanics of her written work. Ninety-five per cent of the teachers considered her composition worth average, or above. There is nothing in any of these ratings to suggest to her the importance of forming more desirable habits. It would seem inexcusable for the school to accept such mechanics from a sixth grade child who has as good a mind as does Mary. The content of her composition is good. The content of Martha's composition, in contrast to Mary's, has little to commend it, and yet Martha has reason to think that she has said something interesting, for nearly half of the teachers would rate her composition average or above, some teachers scoring it excellent.

The rating of average, or above, for both compositions, by approximately half of the teachers, suggests that the two productions are somewhat similar in quality, when, in fact, the contrast between them is striking. The most serious effect of such rating is that the scoring does not suggest to child or teacher wherein the composition is strong or weak. The experiences

which Martha needs for improving the quality of her production differ materially from those which Mary needs. The scores should to some degree point the way. It is probable that a single mark on a composition cannot make this contribution.

Two marks would be more suggestive than one. If a grade on a five-point scale (A, B, C, D, F), for example, were to be given, Mary should receive at least *B*, if not *A*, on the content of her composition. In spite of the broad title (probably suggested by the teacher) Mary developed one main idea in her paragraph. There is continuity and movement in her story. Every sentence contributes to the theme which she selected. If her paragraph were to be rewritten with accurate mechanics, it would be found that Mary has good sentence sense, but she does not take the trouble to give attention to periods and capital letters. For the mechanics of her paper, Mary should be scored *F*. Even a first grade child is taught to put a period at the close of a sentence and a capital at the beginning of it. The failure to indent is a matter, not of rich ideas, but of willingness to consider at what point the pencil or pen should start working. So long as Mary receives a good grade for her product, she will probably not reform.

Martha has merely catalogued chronologically certain uninteresting events of a day. The content of her composition is worth no more than *D*, perhaps *F*. It is likely that she is accustomed to receiving a high mark for a good-looking paper and feels no particular incentive for the selection of interesting ideas or for effective expression of them. Perhaps Martha will never be able to produce creative writing equal to that of some of her classmates, or her problem may be a lack of those experiences which lead to fertility of thought. The mechanics of Martha's paper should be scored *A*.

The purposes of evaluating children's

compositions in school work are very different from those of judging written work on some special occasion, as in a contest. In a contest, the judges look for the composition which is better than all others, and only that best one is given attention after the scoring. In the classroom, on the other hand, the teacher aims to have the child compete with himself and to struggle continually to improve his speech and writing until he gains power in the use of English. The teacher aims to assist the child in finding out wherein he has done well or has fallen short so that he may pass a better judgment on his own product the next time he writes.

It is unfortunate that many teachers look upon the scoring of the final copy of a child's composition as an isolated task, unrelated to the evaluating that is done *before* the final copy reaches the teacher and also *after* the composition has been returned to its owner.

First of all, the writer himself should hold the supreme position among the judges. Unless a child learns to evaluate his own productions, the teacher's scoring will be of little permanent value in creative work. It is to be taken for granted that the child's judgment needs training, since the teacher's judgment also needs it. Training is not synonymous with telling, although some telling on the teacher's part may be helpful at times. Training suggests experiences which lead a child to the development of desired skills.

Sometimes the child's classmates may be helpful in their comments. No doubt this device is often overworked or is not well-directed in some classrooms. If the speaking and writing grow out of some unit, in any subject, on which the children are working earnestly and zealously, a child's classmates may be constructive and clever, as well as frank, in their suggestions. Many children learn more from this experience than from some of the teacher's instruction. Their comments should

relate to the value of the content and not be confined to the mechanics of the composition. When the criticisms of the children become unkindly or too negative, the teacher should ask himself what is wrong with the atmosphere of the classroom or with the teacher-pupil relationship.

The maturer judgment of the teacher, and presumably his keener insight into children's motives and thinking, should enable him to be of great service to the children, and, therefore, his evaluating of the compositions is indispensable.

Certain qualifications are minimum essentials of fitness for judging the worth of a composition. These should be the equipment of children, as well as teacher:

1. Familiarity with the standards in the mechanics of oral and written work, for at least the grade concerned and the preceding grades. By the fourth grade, if not before, children should be supplied with lists of these standards.
 2. Knowledge of the characteristics of a composition whose content is acceptable.
 3. Understanding of the treatment of errors, weighting some more than others.
 4. Ability to offer good and sufficient reasons for the scores given; that is, the score for both the mechanics and content.
 5. Ability to rate the composition, and not the child.
 6. Ability to use intelligently a simple system of symbols for indicating errors.
 7. Ability to recognize that a child who is weak in the mechanics of a paper needs a different type of treatment from the one who is weak in the story element.
- The following suggestions for the child indicate the importance of his part in the evaluating of his composition. They apply equally well to his evaluation of a composition of one of his classmates.
1. In the writing of his rough draft, when his attention should be primarily on the ideas to be expressed and the best way

of expressing them, he must learn to evaluate the worth of what he has written. The child should judge his rough draft in terms of the impression which the reader will likely receive.

2. Just before a child is ready to copy his rough draft, he should examine his checking list and recall the points of mechanics to be remembered as he writes. In this period his attention should be chiefly on the mechanics, and his ideal should be to make his paper as accurate and pleasing as possible, according to the rules of convention. After copying it, he should evaluate the mechanics, probably one point at a time.

3. When the composition has been evaluated by the teacher and returned to its owner, the child should re-evaluate his production in the light of the teacher's judgment. He should not only find and correct his errors, but study whatever rules or other suggestions are necessary to help him to avoid those types of errors in the future. It is surprising how clever many children become in directing their own efforts toward improvement. This, of course, is the goal of the teacher, to secure self-direction and independent habits.

The following suggestions for the teacher are of a twofold nature: those which concern the guidance of child effort and those which suggest marks for the paper:

1. Teacher guidance of effort during the period of the writing of the rough draft of a composition, whether the child is preparing for a speech, or a written poem or story, is one of the most diffi-

cult, and at the same time one of the most important steps in helping children to develop a command of English.

2. A simple, but magic, question may be asked of children just before they begin copying the rough draft, when attention is on the mechanics: "What are you going to try to remember as you copy your story?" The children, not the teacher, should repeat some of the elementary rules concerning form, punctuation, and other mechanics. Later, this question may no longer be needed.

3. When the final copy of a composition is in the teacher's hands, he should (1) evaluate the mechanics and content separately, giving a mark for each or making comments on each phase; and (2) use a simple, useful system of symbols which not only gives definite instructions to the child, but which places upon him the responsibility of both finding and correcting his errors. In the junior high school, such a list as that used in the University High School of The University of Chicago⁸ might be of service, but for the intermediate grades the list should be very much abbreviated. The following symbols may be suggestive: *sp* for spelling; *cap* for capitalization; *p* for punctuation; *n* for neatness; *m* for margins; *✓* for correct item; *x* for incorrect item; *inc* for incomplete; *o* for omit; *pen* for penmanship; *f* for form; *ss* for sentence structure; *A* for insert (a word or other material); and *ok* for an accepted item.

(To be continued)

⁸ Lyman, R. L., *The Enrichment of the English Curriculum*, pp. 105-106. Sup. Educ. Monog., No. 39. Chicago: Department of Education, The University of Chicago, 1932. Pp. viii, 251.

Releasing Language Power*

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LANGUAGE is one of the most precious powers that we possess. Not only does it reveal our culture, our interests, our health, and our personalities, but it is the very material of our thinking. Anything which prevents the natural, satisfying expression of our ideas becomes an interference in the way of clear thinking. It is because I feel that, despite the progress that has been made, schools still erect barriers to good expression instead of opening doors, that I am talking on the topic, "Releasing Language Power," rather than "Developing Language Power."

Those who attended the typical school of the last generation responded when called upon. A few braver souls volunteered. Of ordinary discussion with each other, there was none. Working a problem out together, or helping each other was considered cheating. The kind of compositions that we wrote had no counterpart in a life situation. Now when the pupils of those schools are adults, they find the giving of a simple report at a club, or the making of an announcement an ordeal, but they see no relation between their lack of training and experience in such situations in school and their present inadequacy.

In addition to the fact that the traditional school could hardly be called successful in developing the ability to use language, if the degree of success is measured by the proportion of adults who feel that they express themselves even reasonably well, we have constantly changing

social conditions influencing the type of language training that must be provided by the schools. Daily the variety and number of occasions when we need to use language increases. The rapidity of communication and the ease with which ideas are exchanged have opened up many contacts with people, all of which require the use of language.

Do not misunderstand me when I say we are putting barriers in the way of expression. I realize that we have gone a long way, as we have in reading, and social studies, but may I justify my criticism by pointing out a few of these blocks that we still use? Sometimes I call them the high C's. You know what the attempt to reach high C does to most voices—it produces strain, a shrill, unnatural tone, and little enjoyment for either singer or listener. These high C's of language teaching have a similar result. They are *criticism, competition, and constant correction*.

What would happen to your listening attitude if the chairman told you that as soon as I finished speaking you would be asked to criticize me on these standards: "Did she stick to the point?" "Did she have a good beginning sentence?" "Did she use clear sentences?" "Did she have a good ending sentence?" Of course, you would be told that you must mention a good point first—just to soften the pain of the adverse criticism later—but neither of us would be fooled by that. You would know and I would know that credit would go to you only if you could point out something wrong with my talk. If such direction would change your listening—

* Talk delivered at the Elementary Section of the West Tennessee Teachers Association, Memphis, Tennessee, November 16, 1934.

how would it affect my speaking? Well, it means a terrific barrier in the way of comfortable expression.

A second high C is competition. But you say, "We don't use competition in language." How about that direction, "Let's see who will have the best letter," or "I'll put the best papers on the bulletin board"? But you ask me, "Why not use competition since it's a natural motive and the child will have to meet plenty of it in life?" Leaving out the objection that while it may be an individual incentive, it is not a social motive, I want to say that competition is not present in our life needs in language. Do you struggle to write a better letter than your friend writes to you? Do you compete in conversation? If you do, you are a poor conversationalist. With the varied abilities among pupils in a class, some are always bound to win and others to lose in such competition. There is not only tension but wasted effort and discouragement for a majority of children when pitted against the better pupils of the class in that way.

The third high C is correction, the constant rewording of children's ideas by the teacher. Our ears are so set for errors that I believe, if we heard a child say, "New York ain't as large as Chicago," our first response would be "Isn't, Don—not 'ain't'" and we would miss entirely the fact that the statement was untrue. Just repeating the correct form after a child is futile. Either stop him long enough to distract his attention from his thought to the words he used—or let the error go for the moment. If you stop him, you have put another barrier in the way of his comfortable expression.

I don't think I need to go on with my proof that we are hampering, not releasing language power. I'd like to proceed to more constructive ideas. I'm going to give you first the characteristics of language expression that I think are worth making our objectives. I'm naming them

in the order of their importance in my way of thinking. Then I want to proceed to some methods by which we may reach these goals.

Courtesy, and by that I mean not the superficial polite expressions, but the thoughtfulness that is apparent in letters and conversation of sensitive, kindly people. The courtesy that makes a child know that he ought not to correct his grandfather's poor grammar, or that makes him consider a thank-you note an absolute obligation. The courtesy that makes him answer stranger's questions briefly and in a friendly tone, that makes him give the confused visitor in the building directions.

Interest—the feeling of obligation to have something worth while to say or write, a willingness to hunt for material, and to make preparation for reports. This cannot be secured if all pupils in the class are reporting on exactly the same thing.

Naturalness. We strive hard to standardize speech and yet we like best to hear or to have letters from people who are different. The individuality and spontaneity of children's early speech are the qualities that give it charm.

Clearness—the quality which enables us to understand what a speaker means is not just a matter of sentence structure and punctuation. It is the product of clear thought. If ideas are clear, words come easily for their expression.

Appropriateness. This characteristic is what enables truly great people to talk with anyone, whether it be an illiterate laborer or a college president, and to establish real communication. It is the quality which tells some people how to talk to children without being silly or stupid.

Correctness. There are certain crude expressions that are not heard in the speech nor seen in the writing of cultured people. These the children must be taught to avoid, to prevent their embarrassment in many situations. That the

child must speak without an error and that he must acquire an adult standard, is neither necessary nor possible of achievement. An arbitrary standard cannot be set up for any grade. The assignment of specific items to one grade level for mastery is completely artificial.

Furthermore, it is ridiculous to suppose that you can achieve the same standard in usage with children from all types of homes. To conscientious teachers who are so often more discouraged by the results of their English teaching than any other field, I want to point to the contrary instruction that begins upon the child the minute he leaves the classroom. Poor usage is as infectious as measles, and the exposure possibilities are terrific. For every time that you have used "he did," "he done" has battered away at some child's ear twice as often until it sounds more familiar than the correct form.

Contrary to many oft-repeated statements about habit, most of us can testify from our own experience that the startling discovery that we make an error and the serious desire to overcome it are sufficient drives. Did you ever hear of an adult who corrected a speech or pronunciation error by repeated practice? This is a controversial question, and one on which I may have little agreement with me in this audience, but I am making a plea for saving the child whose speech background is crude from the deadly usage drills that are futile and dull—that make him afraid to speak because he may offend his teacher's sensitive ear. What we can do on the problem of correctness, we will do by the most effective methods research has revealed—but when aims are set up in the minds of teachers, I'd like to write high above correctness—courtesy, interest, naturalness, clearness and appropriateness.

From my description of the kind of language that is valuable to develop, I

should proceed to some suggestions on how, lest I be accused of being a theorist.

In years past, language teachers have tied up all of their teaching of expression with their teaching of literature; then several years ago there came a wave of suggestion that sent language teachers over into the field of social studies. I feel that now we have begun to think more clearly on this matter of correlation. The reasons for using social studies interests for language, are, first, that they provide expression situations like those we have in life; second, that they provide children with something to say and write; and, third, that they make it easy to adjust teaching to the different abilities of pupils by having committee and individual projects. The situations requiring expression are not confined to social studies, however. The keeping of a diary record in a science experiment is just as real a language need. The writing of minutes for the citizenship club is another. Put it this way: Every situation in the classroom requiring language expression should be considered by the language teacher as an opportunity for improving the children's expressional ability.

Then language really becomes communication. In the past, too much of our instruction made language an individual performance, a stunt, judged without consideration of the audience. It is not that sort of language skill that I want our schools to develop. This is a work-a-day world where we have neither time for nor interest in expression without communication. We don't care to receive a letter that is an elaborate composition. We want a direct, clear message.

We will take all opportunities requiring expression, then, and make them the means of developing language power. What opportunities does the classroom present for natural language activities? Let's consider discussion, for instance,

Plans must be made for building the house in a first grade study, for having a Thanksgiving program, or a Christmas party. A problem in the fifth grade has kept children reading for several days, and they finally come together to discuss what they have found out. Trips taken to the newspaper presses or the telephone exchange need to be discussed if wrong concepts are not to be secured.

I do not mean to imply that just talking will develop greater ability in talking. In the mind of the teacher and gradually in the minds of the children will be a standard for the discussion. The teacher may quietly say, "But we are getting off the subject now. Let's get back." The ideal has been transplanted and the children have begun to assume responsibility for their own achievement when some child remarks, "We haven't given Raymond a chance. I know he has something to tell."

Each teacher should have in mind and should gradually lead her class to acquire a standard for discussion by the pupils of her grade. The class standard might run something like this in the fifth grade: (1) If you are discussion leader, call on different pupils to give everyone a chance to take part. (2) Stop discussion that may take you off the problem. (3) Know more about the problem than you tell. (4) Be sure that what you tell is correct. Know your source of information. (5) Be courteous, especially when someone disagrees with you. Do not always expect to have your own ideas accepted. (6) Make no comments that might hurt another's feelings. Respect others' ideas. (7) Bring the discussion to a close by a summary.

In order to release the language power of shy children, who are awed by a class discussion, provide some opportunities for small groups of equally timid children to hold discussions and to bring to the entire class their summaries.

Let's take letter writing as another language skill. Children in one class may write a note of appreciation to children in another class who have given an auditorium program. They may make their own arrangements for trips, and write to government offices or to firms for free material. I need not point out to you the hundreds of chances in the ordinary school to make letter writing real.

Be careful here that the standards which you set up do not inhibit, not only the desire, but the ability to write letters. To test your own emphasis, try this experiment. Ask your fifth or sixth grade class to write briefly the answer to the question, "What makes a good letter?" I'll be willing to wager with you that every pupil will write first such points as correct spelling, good writing, right punctuation and capitalization, correct placing of the heading; and that no child will write what he *really* thinks makes a good letter, such as funny remarks, interesting happenings, something about himself, politeness.

How are we going to teach these children the importance of being tactful, the degree of formality that fits certain people and occasions except by giving them opportunity over and over again to write letters that are real? The best way to impress upon children the obligation to express appreciation for favors received is to see that no trip is completed, no program enjoyed, no gifts received, no speaker heard without a note of thanks following from the children.

Some plan should be devised by which all children participate in such writing instead of competing. A third grade teacher may secure the names of the pupils in another class and see that each of her pupils writes a personal invitation to some child in the other class. Above all, let's send the letter as the child has written it. Let's not correct until it is lifeless.

The making of reports or brief talks is another activity for which there is much need both in and out of school—but thirty reports on the same topic are not natural. After the first report, the others become competitive performance. If the giving of reports is to be real, the topics must be varied so that the class forms an audience and the speaker has the drive to share something that his hearers probably do not know. For the child who is not self-confident, a practice with the teacher may be valuable. She can help him to organize his material and to plan the way in which he will present it. One important factor in releasing language power is a feeling of security. For children this can be increased enormously by careful preparation.

Closely related to this matter of preparing reports is the effective use of books for reference. Even as early as second or third grade, children can begin to find their way into books by using the contents page. They can learn to record the title and the author of a book so that when they are adults they will have the habit of noting titles accurately. A broad language program should include a carefully built sequence by which children are trained to find their way to information in a library. In this matter, the advice that Philip, father of Alexander the Great gave to Aristotle, whom he engaged as a teacher for his son, is pertinent. He said, "Make yourself unnecessary as soon as possible."

Other activities that provide a natural opportunity for language development are book talks, story hours, programs, dramatizations, and listening to educational radio programs. Just a word on book reviews. Most book reports, as they are made in language classes, are made for the purpose of proving to the teacher that the reviewer has read the book. A better motive would be the desire to make

someone else want to read the book. I recall that last summer one Memphis teacher told me of a unique plan by which her class judged the effectiveness of their book talks. A week or so after the reports, a check of the class is made to see how many, if any, other pupils have read the books reviewed. Such a measure seems sound and should, I think, appeal to children as fair and stimulating to their best effort.

The two-way nature of language expression we cannot over-emphasize. We go to lectures and sit back to be charmed or convinced. That we as listeners have a responsibility to complete the circuit of communication few of us really feel. As teachers, let us give more thought to the audience side of language. Only in that way will language be a social force and not just an individual power.

The part that physical vigor and comfortable personal and social relations play in making language expression easy is a phenomenon well known to all of you. There are times when we feel terrified to talk, when we dislike to write a letter and other times when we are eager to do those things. That is the biggest evidence against the habit and drill theory of expression. Our modern schools with their programs of personality study are fast assuring children release from the tensions of physical disability and social maladjustment. When we teachers of language can achieve with children the same pleasure, effort, and interest in language expression that teachers of art achieve with children, we can feel satisfied that we are releasing language power. Words are more universal and natural tools of expression than paints and crayons.

When our aims are right and children know that they are, we will be able to make the opportunity to write and speak as desirable to children as they now consider the chance to paint or draw.

Reading Disabilities and Their Correction*

A Critical Summary of Selective Research

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE CHAIRMAN of the Committee on The Third Annual Research Bulletin submitted to the editor 125 abstracts of scientific studies relating to reading disabilities and their correction from which 45 were to be selected for publication.

Assuming that the most valuable research would be that best known to authorities in the field of reading, the editor wrote eleven authorities requesting their aid in making the necessary selections. They were: B. B. Buckingham, Harvard University; E. A. Betts, State Normal School, Oswego, N.Y.; Ethel Cornell, and W. W. Coxe, New York State Department of Education; D. D. Durrell, Boston University; Arthur I. Gates, Teachers College, Columbia University; William S. Gray, Chicago University; H. A. Greene, Iowa University; W. S. Guiler, Miami University; Delia Kibbe, Wisconsin State Educational Department; and Percival Symonds, Teachers College, Columbia University.

The editor pointed out that The National Conference on Research in Elementary School English is not primarily interested in the compilation of research reports as such, but rather in evaluating research in relation to the improvement of English teaching in the grades.

An alphabetical list (author-title) of the 125 studies abstracted was submitted to each authority with the request that he check the 45 items which in his opinion should be included in the Third Annual Research Bulletin. He was requested further to designate the ten most significant studies of the 45 checked, and the ten least significant. Only the most limited information was given in the list sub-

mitted—author, title, and statement of problem. A judgment was requested on the basis of what was immediately and instantly recognized by the judge as scientifically important and valuable.

The greatest handicap suffered by the judges arose from the fact that many of the abstracts were of unpublished studies, studies in progress, or of studies published in journals not familiar to educators. Nevertheless, all of the eleven authorities made returns, though the most of them declined to attempt rating the ten least significant items.

The abstracts appearing in The Third Annual Research Bulletin were selected, therefore, on the basis of the returns made by these eleven judges. Other factors, however, were given consideration, and in some instances were quite decisive. For example, all abstracts of studies relating to reading in secondary schools, colleges, and universities were barred as outside the field, as were also some that were not on the subject of reading disabilities or seemed to bear but slight relation to this subject. Some abstracts of recent unpublished research obviously unknown to most of the judges, but rated as highly important by the chairman of the Committee, Dr. Emmett A. Betts, were included solely on his check.

The National Conference on Research in Elementary School English, in publishing the abstracts, does not do so in recognition of their intrinsic value, however great this may be, but for convenience in discussion and evaluation. The aim of The Conference is to select each year in a limited field the most significant research available, to publish it for discussion in open forum, to evaluate this research for what it is, and to point out further related research needed. As part of the program of The Fourth Annual Meeting, therefore, the appraisal of The Third Annual Research Bulletin was

* First installment of the Third Annual Research Bulletin of The National Conference on Research in Elementary School English, appearing serially in THE REVIEW.

included with the following speakers as leaders:

Arthur I. Gates, Teachers College, Columbia University: "Principles Underlying the Analysis and Correction of Reading Disabilities of Children."

Donald D. Durrell, School of Education, Boston University: "Tests for the Analysis of Reading Disabilities and for the Appraisal of Corrective Procedures."

William S. Gray, School of Education, University of Chicago: "Problems Relating to Reading Disabilities That Require Scientific Study."

Their discussions will appear in the spring numbers of THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW.

—C. C. CERTAIN, *Secretary*

READING disabilities—their causes, analysis, prevention, and correction—have intrigued investigators in many fields of research. Doctors, educators, psychologists, and lighting research engineers have contributed much to our general understanding of the multiplicity of the problems involved. Few of the data gained are final or conclusive. In fact, a careful inventory of more than one thousand references reveals a dearth of specific and helpful information for the administrator and classroom teacher. The multifarious complexities of attack made on the problem leave the uninitiated quite overwhelmed. Furthermore, the terminology and concepts developed by the various classes of investigators in specialized fields of interest make the integration of the findings a task of no small magnitude, although it must be admitted that such are necessary for definitive distinctions.

Equally impressive is the great range of problems studied. About 1897 Javal first reported his observations regarding discontinuous eye movements in reading. Since then eye specialists, psychologists, physiologists, have added much to our concept of binocular vision and its relation to the reading process. Others have initiated studies of the rôle which audition plays in the learning-to-read process. Maturation, especially the physiological and psychological implications in readiness for reading, has been caused to stand out in bold relief by most of the investigators. The emotional aspects of the

problem have proved to be fruitful for investigation. Before the problems of the disabled readers can be intelligently appraised, the neurologists and psychologists must present additional evidence on the rôle of the higher mental processes. Many external items, more easily controlled, are now under suspicion. Significant among these are typography, lighting conditions, and administrative policies. To the educator and psychologist has been left the problem of methodology. Such is the array which confronts one who would interest himself in the study of reading disabilities.

During the Cleveland meeting of the National Education Association, the Executive Committee of The National Conference on Research in Elementary School English decided to devote their Third Annual Research Bulletin to a selective summary of research on reading disabilities. The chief purposes of the present and preceding bulletins have been to evaluate critically researches in the language arts, to stimulate further investigations, and to encourage school administrators and teachers to translate the findings into practice.

The present bulletin was made possible by the cooperation of the following:

Dr. B. R. Buckingham, Harvard University; Dr. William G. Carr, National Education Association; Dr. Forrest D. Comfort, Harvard University; Dr. Warren W. Coxe, New York State Department of Education; Dr. Donald D. Dur-

rell, Boston University; Dr. Arthur I. Gates, Columbia University; Dr. William S. Gray, University of Chicago; Dr. Harry A. Greene, University of Iowa; Dr. Thorleif Hegge, Wayne County Michigan Training School; Dr. Helen Bass Keller, University of California at Los Angeles; Dr. Marion Monroe, Child Guidance Clinic, Pittsburgh; Mr. Frank Moss, Nela Park Lighting Laboratories, Cleveland, Ohio; Dr. Donald Swanson, University of Iowa; Dr. Joseph Tiffin, University of Iowa; Dr. Miles Tinker, University of Minnesota; Dr. Clifford Woody, University of Michigan; Dr. Gerald A. Yoakam, University of Pittsburgh.

The editorial burden was assumed by C. C. Certain, Executive Secretary of the Conference and Editor of *THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW*.

Contacts were made with the various investigators by canvassing professional magazines, members of the American Psychological Association and several educational organizations, and the research bureaus of public school systems, colleges, and graduate schools. Through these sources, one hundred and twenty-five abstracts were secured. Only forty-three of the abstracts are being published in full; the remainder will be summarized in the supplement to this bulletin. Our organization is able to render a valuable service here because many of the researches are as yet unpublished.

Eight of the abstracts had some bearing on preventive measures; eight dealt with corrective procedures; and twenty-four contained suggestions for the analysis of disabilities. The problem of laterality was investigated by four members. Fourteen of the studies were concerned with the hygiene of reading. It is unfortunate that circumstances did not permit the abstracting of the many fine researches on eye movements directed by Dr. Miles Tinker of the University of Minnesota.

It is interesting to note that ten were independent studies. Of the remainder, thirty were parts of graduate school research programs, two were sponsored by corporations, and one was made possible by the co-operation of several publishing houses.

Within the limits of the data summarized in the forty-three abstracts, the following implications and conclusions appear to be valid:

1. Approximately eight to fifteen per cent of the school population in the intermediate grades present specific reading disabilities. (Betts, Durrell—1, Monroe.)
2. Retardation in reading blocks general educational progress. (Hegge.)
3. Tests involving reading are not adequate measures of intelligence for disabled readers. (Durrell—2.)
4. The concept of reading readiness is enlarged to include both psychological and physiological readiness to read. (Betts, Bond, Cutright, Davidson, Dearborn, Eames—1 and 2, Eurich, Fendrick, Gates—2, Hildreth.)
5. There is urgent need of research on typography of materials used by disabled and beginning readers. Other things being equal, large size type should probably be used for corrective materials. (Blackhurst, Buckingham.)
6. The ascenders and descenders of letters are probably important elements in visual fusion. The upper segments of letters "play a dominant part in perception of words." (Cosgrave.)
7. Illumination intensity should be controlled in all reading situations. (Luckiesh—1 and 2.)
8. Care should be exercised to insure advantageous positions in the classroom for disabled learners. Other things being equal, the best position is probably in the front of the classroom. (Conoley.)
9. Eye dominance is probably unre-

lated to sex, intelligence, and visual acuity. (Crider.)

10. There appears to be little, if any, relationship between reversal errors and mixed hand-eye dominance, although the question is not yet settled. (Gates—1, Peters, Teegarden.) The incidence of reversal errors among left handed individuals is no greater than among the right handed. (Phillips.)

11. Tests used for analysis of disabilities should not only appraise the sensory level but should also provide some index to the efficiency of the mental processes involved. (Betts, Bond.)

12. It is possible that there is greater incidence of aniseikonia among disabled readers. (Dearborn.)

13. Refractive errors and fusion inadequacies appear to be factors in some cases of reading disability. (Betts, Eames—1, 2, and 3, Fendrick, Gates—4.)

14. Lateral eye-muscle imbalance is probably not a significant factor contributing to reading disability. (Fendrick.)

15. For normal elementary school pupils, eye movements improve progressively. (Eurich, Gray—1.)

16. Good readers exceed poor readers in "purposefulness, technique, discrimination and association." (Birdsell.)

17. Disabled readers present inadequate motor and perceptual reading habits. (Duffy, MacCallum, Mitzfeld, Sears.)

18. Good readers excel "poor" readers in visual perception. (Fendrick, Gates—4, Gray—1.)

19. Certain auditory factors, such as acuity and sound discrimination, should be appraised. (Hincks, Warnke.)

20. Reversal errors decrease with an increase in maturity. (Davidson, Hildreth, Phillips, Teegarden.) First grade entrants normally exhibit a reversal tendency. (Teegarden.)

21. Among first grade entrants, boys exhibit a greater reversal tendency than girls. (Davidson.) For specific reading disabilities in the intermediate grades, boys outnumber the girls. (Betts, Cutright, Gates—1, Durrell—1.)

22. Corrective reading should cause one type of imagery to reinforce another. (Betts, Bond.)

23. Kinaesthetic training is probably an essential element in corrective procedures. (Keller, Kirk.)

24. To a degree, school failures vary according to certain administrative policies. (Cutright.)

25. Classroom administration permitting, small groupings in terms of reading needs is a desirable procedure. (Davis.)

A Critical Summary of Selective Research

Betts, Emmett Albert, "A Physiological Approach to the Analysis of Reading Disabilities." Published in *The Elementary English Review*, April, 1934, Vol. XI, No. 4; *Educational Research Bulletin*, Vol. XIII, Nos. 6 and 7, September and October 1934; *Progressive Education Magazine*, Vol. XI, No. 8, December, 1934.

Character of Research: Development of analysis procedures and an inventory of physiological limitations of first grade entrants.

Problem: (1) To develop a battery of tests for

the determination of physiological and psychological readiness to read; such materials to be used with other analyses of readiness and of disabilities. (2) To inventory certain physiological and psychological aspects of first grade entrants and follow the cases for a period of years. (3) To analyze certain symptoms and causes of reading disabilities.

Limitations of Study: (1) The physiological inventory (Betts Ready to Read Tests) was limited to the study of near-point (reading distance) and far-point fusion, stereopsis, vertical and lateral im-

balance, visual acuity (binocular and monocular), and refractive errors. (2) The psychological inventory (Betts Ready to Read Tests) was limited to visual discrimination between word forms and letter forms and to auditory span. Auditory acuity and auditory frequency range were not controlled. (3) Targets on slides used for tests of visual sensation and perception and oculomotor habits approximated the size of 18 point type found in first grade readers. (4) Maturation was not experimentally controlled. No test of general intelligence was administered. Over a period of years the same schools have had an average I.Q. of 114 with less than 5% of the school population below 90. (5) The cause of faulty fusion was not controlled. Amplitude of fusion was appraised, but the amount of aniseikonia was not accounted for. (6) Auditory frequency range was not tested. (7) In this study the emphasis was upon sensory aspects of visual disabilities. (8) No sociological controls were exercised.

Procedure: Tests of visual sensation and perception and of oculomotor and perception habits were prepared on slides for use with the Keystone Ophthalmic Telebinocular.

Tests of visual readiness were developed. All tests were printed in 14 and 18 point type in order to approximate that found in typical first grade reading materials. The Letter Form Test was a matching test. The technique employed for the Word Form Test was that of finding the unlike word.

Tests of auditory readiness were developed. A test of memory span, using an auditory stimulus, was used in this study. Certain characteristics of "good" and "poor" readers were determined in a preliminary study. The tests were administered to 190 first grade entrants. The inter-pupillary distances were taken for 684 pupils in the kindergarten and first six grades.

Specific Findings and Conclusions: (1) The greatest gain in inter-pupillary distance is during the sixth year (first grade). (2) 25% of the first grade entrants could not discriminate between one-half of the pairs of word forms presented. (3) 98% of the first grade entrants could match all the letter forms presented. (4) 11% of the first grade entrants evidenced significant eye muscle imbalances. One-half

of these cases over-converged; the remainder experienced divergence. (5) 13% of the first grade entrants did not possess normal far-point fusion: i.e. there was not co-ordinate action of the eyes for distance seeing. (6) 13.7% of the first grade entrants failed to pass a normal near-point fusion test: i.e. binocular co-ordination was not present for reading distance (in this case the readings were taken at the equivalent of 13½ inches.) The identical percentages for near-point and far-point fusion failures were accidental although there were some overlapping of cases.

(7) 93% of the first grade entrants passed a normal visual acuity test; 86% were normal for the left eye, and 85% were normal for the right eye. The average per cent of binocular visual acuity was 96.4; left eye visual acuity 94.1 and right eye, 93.9. (8) Only 2% of the cases exhibited vertical muscle imbalance. (9) 60% of the first grade entrants exhibited stereopsis or depth perception. This was used as a power test of binocular co-ordination. (10) 15% of the first grade entrants appeared to be normally free from refractive errors (such as astigmatism, farsightedness, and near-sightedness). 42% were farsighted which is not abnormal for children. Less than 43% were near-sighted in both eyes.

(11) An individual may exhibit a muscle imbalance and yet experience fusion and a fair degree of stereopsis. (12) Many severely disabled readers failed to pass the stereopsis test. It is significant that some of these individuals do possess some binocular co-ordination but it is sometimes of a very low order. (13) Good readers appear to use one eye or have good binocular co-ordination. (14) The causes of faulty binocular co-ordination during the reading process need further intensive study. (15) For some cases, the correction, by a specialist, of certain ocular and visual anomalies will result in the improvement of certain reading abilities. (16) The percentage of good readers who apparently compensate for visual disabilities has not been adequately explained.

Implications: Success in beginning reading is probably significantly related to specific psychological and physiological maturations.

(To be continued)

Improving the Elementary English Curriculum

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THE SCHOOL curriculum may be thought of as the precipitate of racial and family experience which is left after the substances which have held it in suspension have evaporated. In a similar way the school, as a social institution, is crystallized from the volatile social and economic forces swirling about it. Thus the school and, to a large degree, the curriculum which it offers, has a certain stability or permanence which society itself does not seem to have. Accordingly, the school curriculum is continually out of adjustment with its environment. The social demands on the individual change rapidly. The content of the curriculum possesses a sort of inertia which makes it impossible for it to change as rapidly as do the demands of society.

This lack of adjustment between the school's offerings and life's demands on the school operates in two directions. The first of these lies in the retention in the curriculum of much that is obsolete. The second is the failure of the curriculum to anticipate adequately the demands of modern life. Even the most modern of language textbooks and the most recent of courses of study in language contain much that is no longer required by the demands of modern life or by the usages of cultivated and educated citizens. Of much more serious consequence is the failure of the school curriculum to keep pace with the changing demands of society and to anticipate these new demands. Clearly the curriculum does not keep pace with life. The certainty that these social demands will continue to be

present and to change, and the recognition that the curriculum is constantly out of adjustment make it imperative that careful thought and constructive effort be given to the maintenance of a curriculum which has some chance of being effective in a dynamic society. Particularly is this true of elementary school English.

The construction of the curriculum in elementary English is handicapped by many complicated and difficult problems, prominent among which are such factors as (1) the complexity of the language itself, (2) the absence of adequate authority for the determination of acceptable practices and usages, and (3) the difficulties in the way of the identification of the basic skills. Language does not lend itself readily to analysis into clearly defined groups of related skills as is true in the case of many other school subjects.

The complexity of language in even its simplest forms is well illustrated by the following example. A few years ago, at the suggestion of the writer, a preliminary check was begun on the problem of determining how many grammatically correct verb-pronoun combinations could be made. The seven pronouns and forty-four verb forms found among the first five hundred words in an extensive writing vocabulary list were selected. These high frequency pronouns and verbs obviously are among those words which carry the major burden in the written forms of language. The results of this check revealed a total of more than ten thousand grammatically correct combinations of these pronouns with the verb

forms and the auxiliaries in the list. If this is a true picture of the case, what of the possibilities of the combinations of the less frequent verbs and pronouns, or of the high frequency nouns and verbs? The number of such possible combinations must run into the millions. Sometimes we wonder at the inadequate mastery of many phases of the English language resulting from our school training. We should more suitably marvel that *any* mastery results when we note the inadequate opportunity for learning which is provided on many of these skills.

Among the serious difficulties in the development of the language curriculum is a thing which, for the want of a better name, we have designated as *absence of authority*. Thus far in textbook and curriculum work there is little or no basis for agreement on practices. The apparent authority in each case is the individual author himself. An examination of many modern textbooks and courses of study shows this to be the case, not only as concerns the details of instructional content, but particularly as to the grade placement of the material submitted for mastery. Two types of attack on this problem have been suggested. The first proceeds on the doubtful assumption that common social usage is an adequate criterion for use in deciding all debatable language usage issues. It works on what to the writer appears to be a mistaken assumption that adult mastery in the field of language exists at an adequate level. The second approach to the problem emphasizes the need for the establishment of ultimate standards of acceptable practice. It is based on the assumption that for the specific guidance needed in determining such ultimate standards, we must turn to individuals who are spending the majority of their time and effort in the actual application of the practices involved.

One of the significant attempts to apply this first point of view in setting up a criterion outside of his own personal

judgment is the work begun by the late Dr. Sterling A. Leonard.¹ To a certain extent, the result of this investigation has been to lower the plane of what has been considered good usage in many instances. If the course of study in elementary school language is to function constructively, it must look beyond the present abilities, attitudes, and ideals of society for its goals and standards of usage in language.

Somewhat in contrast with these cross-sections of opinion relative to good usages is an attempt to establish an objective and impersonal ultimate criterion of acceptable practices in the mechanics of written English in which the writer has been personally interested. It is based upon the general assumption that for the specific guidance needed in determining such ultimate standards in the tool skills we must turn to individuals who are spending the majority of their time and effort in the actual application of the practices involved. For specific guidance in determining desirable ultimate goals in the mechanics of written English one would naturally turn to the editorial departments of the large publishing houses. Surely, if those responsible for the editorial practices in the great publishing houses do not know which usages are desirable and acceptable it is doubtful if anyone does.

The specific approach to the problem was made by requesting twenty-six well-known publishing houses to furnish the names of any guides or manuals of style used in their editorial departments. Replies were received from twenty-five companies stating that they were using their own handbooks, or naming the book or books used as their criteria. From this list, seven manuals of style were chosen as best representing the guides used by these editorial departments. These handbooks were subjected to a most detailed and critical analysis and cross-checking.

¹ Published posthumously as a monograph by the National Council of Teachers of English under the title of *Current English Usage*. See THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW for September, 1934.

The summary of this analysis reveals the punctuation and capitalization practices which are of major importance in terms of their frequency of mention by authorities in these fields. This study is now in published form² so that it is unnecessary to go into a detailed discussion of the results.

Another type of approach to objectivity in the language curriculum is found in the results of two other investigations which have only recently been completed under the writer's direction. The first of these is the study by Dr. Cesander³ in which he made an extensive check of the punctuation usages of children in their own writings against the criterion previously described. As a result of this analysis we have some very useful objective data indicating the control of the well-known punctuation practices which children of grades four to eight have developed. The practical results of this study to one interested in the language curriculum lie in the recommended minimal list of punctuation skills actually used by pupils in their own attempts at writing in grades four to eight inclusive, and in the indirect evidence on grade placement.

A slightly different, although equally objective and interesting attack on this same problem is that undertaken by Dr. Bontrager⁴ during the past year. This study used as its starting point the criterion previously described. An examination of the specific punctuation practices which appear to represent the more important of these skills as catalogued in this criterion indicates that from a learning point of view any given usage is not as simple as it seems. For example, a single rule covers the use of the comma in direct address. But an examination of the situations under which this use may occur in-

dicates at least three very common usages. For instance, we may find such situations as "Can you go, Tom?"; "Tom, can you go?"; "Will you go, Tom, as soon as you can?" From the point of view of the *rule* these are one usage. From the child's point of view as a *learner*, three distinct usages are involved, each of which must be mastered through experience and use, not through incidental contact or transfer.

As a result of this type of analysis of the basic punctuation practices as identified in the criterion, we now know that there are many such variations. Of course, not all of these are of equal social significance. The real problem now demanding an answer is that of determining just which of these many variations actually carry the burden of social usage. Possibly the use of the comma following the person addressed, to refer to our previous illustration, represents three-fourths of the total use of this skill. If so, we should know that, and adjust the instructional emphasis accordingly. As a move in this direction the writer now has a study under way involving the mechanical tabulation and analysis of a million and a half running words of the writing of school children. When this analysis is completed it should reveal definitely and objectively which of these variations actually carry the major burden of social usage and hence are important for instructional purposes.

Another problem which has long disturbed the language curriculum worker is that of securing definite data on the oral language skills. For a number of years the oral language field has been considered a fruitful source of instructional material. In the past the majority of such data has been collected by means of shorthand or longhand records. Recent evidence shows however, that not only are such records of language activities incomplete, but they are often seriously in error. The development of equip-

² Greene, H. A., *A Criterion for the Course of Study in the Mechanics of Written Composition*. University of Iowa Studies in Education, Volume VIII, No. 4, March 1, 1933.

³ Cesander, Paul K., "A Study of Pupil Usage as a Factor in Grade Placement of Certain Items of Punctuation." Doctor's Dissertation, University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1931.

⁴ Bontrager, O. R., *An Experimental Appraisal of Pupil Control of Certain Punctuation Items*. University of Iowa Studies in Education, Vol. IX, No. 2, March 15, 1934.

ment for the electric recording of all types of classroom language activity now makes it possible to secure a complete picture of the total language situation.

The results of a carefully controlled experiment carried on by Dr. Emmett A. Betts⁸ showed that the machine recorded so accurately that on the average only three words per thousand were not sufficiently intelligible to be agreed upon by three proof readers. On the same material, for each thousand words dictated to a selected group of shorthand reporters only 643 words were taken down and a later check showed that only 535 were correctly transcribed. More than two-thirds of the longhand records and six-sevenths of the phonetician's records were incorrectly taken or transcribed.

During the past two years the recording apparatus has been utilized in securing the raw materials for at least two investigations of some curricular consequence. One involves the recording throughout the year of a series of development lessons in first grade language. This will make available for the first time a complete objective picture of language growth in the first grade group, not to mention a most unusual collection of demonstration lessons in the teaching of language in the primary grades. Another major project which is now practically completed involves its use in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades for the purpose of collecting an extensive sampling of all types of oral language activities in which children engage in connection with their school work. More than one hundred thousand running words of oral language have been recorded, transcribed, and transferred to Hollerith cards by means of an objective code. Out of this collection of data much interesting and objective information has already been obtained concerning the types and complexity of sentences used by pupils. They

will be further analyzed to reveal evidence on the identity and frequency of usage of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs. This type of information should practically guarantee the possibility of including in the language curriculum opportunity for pupil-experience with the precise oral language forms which children themselves struggle to utilize.

In this discussion three different but none the less basic suggestions for putting objectivity into the language curriculum have been presented. The establishment of adequate objective authority for the selection of significant and acceptable practices for inclusion in the curriculum is absolutely basic. The need for more accurate and more complete data on the oral language usages is apparent. Social demands on oral language ability are far in excess of the instructional emphasis which the schools have given it, part of which is due to inadequate instructional material, and part to the fact that teachers of language find it much easier to work on the written language skills. If the outcomes of language instruction are to be properly balanced we must have more curricular and teacher emphasis on the oral language abilities, and this emphasis must be based upon an accurate objective picture of the total of oral language and not upon brief and incomplete samplings of the error aspects alone. In the field of the mechanical skills we face the problem of determining objectively the acceptable practices, but more important than that in many respects we face the necessity of discovering through extensive investigation just which ones of these many variations in skills actually carry the load in social usage. It is the writer's firm belief that from the results of research now available and under way will come suggestions which will significantly influence the selection of subject-matter content and the placement of instructional emphasis in the language curriculum of the future.

⁸ Betts, Emmet Albert, *An Evaluation of Certain Techniques for the Study of Oral Language*. University of Iowa Studies in Education, Vol. IX, No. 2, March 15, 1934.

Editorial

Wordiology

SOME TIME ago, a member of the English department of the University of Chicago announced a test for wordiness in freshman English papers. It is surprising, and perhaps significant, that tests for wordiness have not yet gained much recognition; significant in that excessive verbiage has become equally characteristic of the educator and of the novice in English composition. Teachers have not only despaired of teaching the concise and accurate expression of thought, but have themselves become engaged in the development of wordiness as a phase of rhetoric.

Miss Ethel Mabie comments, page 66, in her article on "Releasing Language Power," "This is a workaday world where we have neither time for, nor interest in expression without communication. We don't care to receive a letter that is an elaborate composition. We want a direct, clear message." Nevertheless, one who sits in educational audiences these days, soon becomes aware of the fact that a technique has been developed for a new form of discourse—one which might be termed wordiology—the science of speaking and writing volubly, but without meaning. This is something different from sophistry, because in sophistry there is reasoning, however specious, while in wordiology, language is used with the utmost glibness, but with only the slightest rational application.

The technique of the wordiologist is to develop an elaborate nomenclature in relation to some vaguely postulated idea.

In part, the wordiologist achieves his effect by drawing parallels, for example, between pedagogy and medicine, with little point in the comparison but with elaborate application of such terms as "causation," "medication," "specificity,"

and the like, to education. Or, to display his nomenclature, the speaker or writer may spread himself mentally over pedagogy, geometry, and psychology, and juggle such words as "centrality," and "peripheral" in pedagogical subject matter. The result is a display of verbiage, and a paucity of ideas.

The thought behind the wordiologist's discourse is frequently so tenuous that one can follow it with difficulty, obscured as it is by verbosity. The difficulties of diction are heightened by the fact that the reader cannot, as is the case in great literature, glean the meaning of unfamiliar words from context. The wordiologist seldom deigns an appositive or explanatory phrase; the words themselves are the context. He will speak of "specificity of causation," but will rarely follow with a definite example, as "no tuberculosis without tubercular bacilli."

One fabricated term leads to the fabrication of other terms. Thus "verticality" has its opposite "horizontality" in curriculum making; "fractionated" brings with it "compartmentalization," and "types of error and their cruciality" is accompanied by phrases like "the problem of specificity of objectives," "remediation," and "self-medication," until a listener or reader finds simple things obscured by a cumbersome, inappropriate vocabulary. A weighty educational tractate will expound the concept "integration" by analysis that becomes more and more involved in terminology and in abstraction.

Thoreau describes this type of discourse succinctly when he says: "A writer who does not speak out of his full experience uses torpid words, wooden or lifeless words, such words as 'humanity,' which have a paralysis in their tails."